

1st Figures On Gas Cut Erroneous

Associated Press

The Nixon administration said last night it planned to cut gasoline production 5 per cent below 1972 levels, after letting the nation believe all day that it was in for a 25 per cent cut.

The Federal Energy Office issued proposed regulations to allocate crude oil and petroleum products, amounting to a partial fuel rationing system yesterday morning.

The regulations included at three different places a specific reduction of gasoline production, 25 per cent below 1972 levels, but that figure, official spokesmen said last night, was wrong all along.

"We screwed up this morning," said Jonathan Brown, an official of the new energy office. "We had two separate drafts of the regulations and we took the number from one and inserted it in the language of the other."

The number was corrected, in a copy sent to the Federal Register for publication, to specify a gasoline production cut of only 5 per cent from 1972 levels, sources in the energy office said.

But nobody thought of notifying the news media, which were printing and broadcasting the erroneous 25 per cent cutback throughout the nation.

Public reaction to the mistaken announcement could only be guessed, as motorists faced what looked like a horrendous gasoline shortage shaping up at the filling station pump early next year.

The stock market, sliding downward ever since the energy crisis began with the Arab oil cutoff in October, fell sharply again yesterday, and brokers blamed the new decline on confusion over the extent and impact of the nation's fuel shortages.

The error was not made public and corrected for news media until a reporter for The New York Times called to ask other questions about the program.

The reporter, Edward Cowan, said that the official he spoke to mentioned the error in the course of the conversation. "I sure was surprised," Cowan said.

Even then, the energy office did not volunteer the information to other news organizations. Other newsmen calling about The Times' version were informed of the error, which by that time was 10 hours after the first news reports went out.